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SUBJECT: IMPROMPTU "SMS GRAPEVINE" DEMONSTRATIONS BY
STUDENTS AS FRANCE WAITS FOR CHIRAC'S INTERVENTION IN
CONFRONTATION OVER CPE

REF: A. (A) EMBASSY PARIS SIPRNET DAILY REPORT FOR MARCH

31

[1](#)B. (B) PARIS 2095 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)1. (U) During the day of March 31, most university and high school students who have mobilized against the Villepin government's First Employment Contract (CPE) (ref A) took in the news of President's Chirac's likely promulgation of the controversial law (ref B). Some however, engaged in a range of impromptu demonstrations and protest actions -- blocking traffic, parading through railroad stations and the like -- in cities throughout France, including Paris. In Paris, students packed a few subway trains to the breaking point and sent riot police scurrying from one part of the city to another in an effort to keep up with the protean, shifting nature of this novel form of political activity.

[1](#)2. (U) One suburban rail line was blocked for a brief time, and there was a cortege of few hundred students who marched from the Paris City Hall to the Bastille and staged a sit-in there. Another group of about a hundred and fifty students, headed towards the Place de la Concorde near the Embassy, were diverted by police into a nearby park. As of late afternoon local time March 31, there are reports of such actions, in addition to Paris, in Marseille, Toulouse, Nice, Dijon and Strasbourg. Nothing in current media reports and information from RSO police contacts indicates that these are more than minor and largely peaceful disturbances, each involving less than a few hundred students, so far.

[1](#)3. (U) The student associations and leftist "student unions" that purport to be leading the protest in France's university and high school systems, late on the afternoon of March 31, called for "mass gatherings" at central squares in cities and towns throughout the country at 7:30 PM tonight -- half an hour before President Chirac is scheduled to address the nation on the next steps he plans to take in regard to the CPE controversy (ref A). It remains to be seen if the gatherings will draw large numbers of these "pre-positioned" protestors. In addition, it remains to be seen whether the course of action advocated by the President will placate the restiveness of these students, or, alternatively, kindle a renewed impetus for protest activity of some kind. Police authorities, as always, worry about the unpredictability of large crowds, should such crowds materialize pursuant to this call for "mass gatherings." The impromptu protest actions that have taken place yesterday and today have been confined to students, and have not been infiltrated by hooligans.

Comment

[1](#)4. (U) The smaller protest actions by students that took place yesterday and today, and the potentially larger one called for this evening, are clear evidence of the way the students' anti-CPE protest movement is largely held together by leaderless activity on internet blogs and SMS messaging nets. Police intelligence officials are well aware of this activity and try to monitor it. End Comment.
Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Stapleton